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Chattanooga Selected as Tennessee RiverTown

Scenic City joins 20 river communities that are home to more than 1 million people; will benefit from economic development and entrepreneurship opportunities

Chattanooga, Tenn. (Friday, Oct. 22, 2021) — The Tennessee RiverLine today designated Chattanooga as a Tennessee RiverTown, joining 20 other communities as part of a partnership that expands economic development, entrepreneurship opportunities, quality of life amenities, and equitable access to river experiences for residents.

The project, which is sustained by principal partners University of Tennessee and the Tennessee Valley Authority, is designed to create a continuous system of trail experiences, including paddling, hiking and biking, along the 652-mile Tennessee River from Knoxville, Tenn., to Paducah, Ky.

Since its inception in 2016, partner cities have benefitted from the project in a number of ways:

- Trail amenities designed by university students
- Shared research and best practices
- Access to outreach programs and grants
- Access to additional funding, research and partnership opportunities through TVA and UT.

“Chattanooga’s outdoor resources — from its mountains and forests to its rivers and lakes — are its greatest competitive advantage, and partnerships like the Tennessee RiverLine are a critical way to capitalize on these resources by leveraging expertise, funding and research from outside our borders to build a stronger community,” said Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly. “I expect that Chattanooga will not only benefit from these partnerships, but will also be a major contributor to the other cities in our cohort as we share our own best practices.”

The Tennessee RiverLine and external funders have so far invested more than \$1 million into communities involved in the project, and in 2021 TVA provided an investment of \$1.2 million to ensure the longevity of the initiative.

Akosua Cook, parks planner for the city of Chattanooga, was instrumental in securing Chattanooga’s selection to the RiverTowns cohort. Criteria for selection included a demonstrated understanding of the

Tennessee RiverLine vision and its guiding principles, as well local partnerships necessary to sustain an applicant's participation in the program.

"It's hard not to think of Chattanooga without recognizing the fact that it is a river town, a scenic city shaped by the Tennessee River that flows through it, weaving the fabric that makes us a premier destination for outdoor recreation nationwide," Cook said.

The Tennessee River system in which Chattanooga is located includes about 11,000 miles of shoreline, 650,000 surface acres of reservoir water and 293,000 acres of reservoir lands.

"This is the first step in a process that will benefit Chattanooga for generations to come, and will safeguard access to our city's outdoor resources for all residents," said Erik Schmidt, director of sustainability for the city of Chattanooga. "Most importantly, this program allows partner cities to not only highlight and attract visitors to the unique resources in their backyard, but to showcase the importance of preserving one of the most biodiverse river systems in the world."

The RiverLine program originated with UT's School of Landscape Architecture, and today is led by full-time staff. The Tennessee Aquarium is also part of the program.

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